

Every time I pick up a new decorative painting product at the paint store, I am discouraged by the lack of instructions. The directions tend to be oversimplified and fail to mention the many little tricks that make a decorative-painting project successful. Glazing kits are a perfect example.

A glaze is a semitransparent layer of paint applied over a complementary solid color, or base coat. You've probably heard of ragging, bagging, or sponging. These glazing techniques are named for the tools used to create the texture. For centuries, artisans have used glazes to add texture and depth to art, furniture, and walls. Glazes are a great alternative to solid colors and wallpaper, and are an excellent way to hide flaws in imperfect walls.

Mixing the glaze is the easy part. You don't need a kit, just a few basic ingredients, the right color combination, and good technique. As a decorative painter, I've learned a lot about using glazes, but one thing I can't stress enough is that practice makes perfect.

Start with a sample board

I do sample boards for every job. Sample boards give me a chance to try different color combinations and textures, and to establish the right glaze formula. Most important, though, sample boards are a great way to practice technique and to see how colors interact.

I use 2-ft. by 2-ft. pieces of tempered hardboard for my samples, but you can use a scrap piece of drywall or any other smooth surface as a sample board. Remember, bigger is better. When you put the sample in the room, a

Painting Walls With Glazes

Add a little texture and a lot of character to your walls with a decorative painter's formula for glazing

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MIX AND TEST THE GLAZE

Even if you've already done samples, it's a good idea to test the glaze that you mix for the actual project.

larger board gives a better reading of what the color and texture will look like on the walls.

Priming the boards before you start is a good idea. This way, the boards won't swell and the paint will adhere well so that you can use one board for multiple samples. The first sample is rarely a screaming success. On this job, the homeowner liked my first sample but asked that I make it "just a little bit darker" when I did the walls. Even though it was a simple adjustment, I did one last sample to make sure the glaze was right.

Match the colors to the room

You'll need two paint colors: a base-coat color and a glaze color. You can start by choosing one overall color as a starting point for the glaze. I usually use the furniture, the art, or a fabric in the room for inspiration. Matching paint to objects is always easier than matching objects to paint. Here, I based the color combination on an existing Asian carpet.

I use paint chips to decide on the first color, then choose a second color either a little lighter or a little darker than the first choice, but in a similar hue. I've had the best results using different values of the same color paint. In this case, I used two shades of orange.

When I make my samples, I usually do two versions, reversing the base-coat and glaze colors. Most of the time, I find that darker glazes over lighter base coats work best. The lighter base coat gives the impression of light coming through, and the glaze creates texture and depth. Of course, decorative painting is as much an art as it is a science, so don't be afraid to experiment with color or texture.

Texture and technique take practice

There are positive and negative glazes. A positive glaze is applied and textured in one step. Sponging a glaze onto the wall is positive glazing. Negative glazes are applied and textured in separate steps. Applying the glaze with a brush, roller, or pad and then creating texture by dabbing a sponge against the wall is negative glazing. The texture here is created by removing glaze from the surface.

Base-coat with the right paint. Base-coating the walls for a glaze is just like painting a wall normally. Cut in the ceiling and trim, and roll out the walls. Use a midrange sheen like satin or pearl, and expect to use two coats to cover primed walls.



Start with paint and glazing liquid. Most paint stores have graduated buckets ideal for measuring glazes. Mix 1 part paint with 2 parts glazing liquid in a bucket, and stir them well. Then test the glaze on a sample board (inset photo). The glaze should spread a little more easily and thinly than paint. Add thinner as needed to help the paint flow across the surface. For coverage, refer to the glaze label.

I do almost all negative glazing, but I use a variety of tools to create different textures. This glaze, textured with cheesecloth, softens the appearance of the walls and produces an organic, atmospheric feeling. Alternatively, a strie—streaky vertical lines—is created with a dry, stiff-bristle brush and can be more formal and pronounced.

Use your sample boards to find and refine a texture that is right for your project. There are a number of tools—from expensive horsehair stippling brushes to plastic shopping bags—that can be used to texture a glaze (sidebar p. 74).

Open time matters

In some states, oil-based paints (or alkyds) are no longer available because they don't meet VOC standards. For now, they are still available in Connecticut, where I do most of my work. Although I use water-based paints wherever I can, including base coats, I mix my glazes with oil-based paint and glazing liquid (see the sidebar on p. 74 for



Glazing can be messy. Cover the floors with drop cloths, and tape the trim and ceiling.



Wet your tools. If you start with a dry pad and texturing tool, the glaze will change as you work and the tools become saturated with paint. Here, the author is using a ball of cheesecloth for texture. To keep the glaze consistent, she works some of the glaze into the pad and cheesecloth before starting.

tips on glazing with latex paint). Because I work alone, I appreciate the longer open time of oil-based paint. Open time is the amount of time I can work the glaze before it starts to set up. Weather also can affect open time. The best time to glaze is on a cool, damp day.

Glazes have three ingredients: paint, glazing liquid, and paint thinner. The paint adds color, the glazing liquid extends the paint's open time, and the paint thinner thins the glaze. I was taught to start with 1 part paint, 1 part glazing liquid, and 1 part paint thinner. That formula is easy to remember, but I often found that I had too much paint and thinner in the mix. Now I start with 1 part paint, 2 parts glazing liquid, and no thinner. This way I can adjust the glaze without making an excessive amount.

When I make my first samples, I mix a small amount, about ½ quart, of glaze. If I want more color saturation or a denser texture, I add a little paint at a time until I'm happy with the sample. The glaze should spread across the sample board (and later, the walls) more easily and thinly than paint. If it is too thick, I add small amounts of paint thinner until it flows easily across the surface. Be careful, though. If you thin the glaze too much, the paint thinner decreases the open time, and although the glaze might look good on a horizontal board, it might not hold a texture and could run down the walls.

When the glaze dries, it will acquire the sheen of the paint that you used. I prefer a low-luster look, so I use only matte, flat, or eggshell paints for my glazes.

Prep and base coat first

The prep work for glazing is the same as for any other interior painting. Fill any holes, caulk the trim, sand damaged paint, and prime the walls if they are old or in bad condition.

Base-coating is also straightforward: Cut in the ceiling and trim, and roll out the walls the way you would any painting project. Be sure to use paint with the right sheen. I use two coats of Benjamin Moore's latex pearl finish for most of my base coats. It has midrange sheen, between eggshell and semigloss, which is ideal for glazing. Glazes dry too quickly on flat sheens, and they don't adhere well to glossier surfaces. I always let the final base coat set up for 24 hours before glazing.

I glaze one wall at a time, so I tape the adjacent unglazed walls to keep them clean. Wall edges are one of the most commonly flawed areas because people worry about getting glaze on adjacent surfaces. Even if I don't tape all the surrounding areas, I don't sacrifice the quality of the glaze to avoid making a mess. Instead, I'm always prepared to clean or touch up the adjacent unglazed wall, ceiling, or trim later.

Pay attention to the edges

If you did a sample on a horizontal surface, expect gravity to change things a little on vertical walls. Start in an



1 **Begin with a triangle in a corner.** Apply the glaze with a pad, starting in an upper corner. Stay about 1 in. from the trim, ceiling, and adjacent wall.



2 **Work the edges with a brush.** Before texturing the glaze, work it up to the edges with a small disposable brush. Don't brush the glaze; push it with the tips of the bristles to create texture.

GLAZE ONE WALL AT A TIME

Once you start glazing, you'll need to move quickly to get the job done before the glaze begins to set up. Start in a corner and stop at the end of each wall. This way, when you're done with the wall, you'll be able to go back and fix any flaws while the glaze is still open.



3 **Glaze in a diagonal pattern.** As you work across the wall, apply and texture the glaze in 12-in. to 18-in. diagonal bands. Work first from the top down, then from the bottom up.



4 **Keep a wet edge.** Don't texture all the way to the edge of the most recently applied glaze. Leave it wet and heavy to keep it from setting up. On the next pass, work the newly applied glaze into the wet edge.



5 **Marry two glazed walls carefully.** When you reach the end of a wall and meet a recently glazed wall, it is important to get all the way into the corner without getting any glaze on the adjacent surface. Use the disposable brush again to push the glaze carefully into the corner.

Colors and textures customize any room

One of the benefits of glazing is that you can produce a one-of-a-kind look at a low cost. Two variables, color and texture, can be used to create a custom finish. Varying shades of the same color tend to work well together, but color combinations are limited only by your imagination. You even can use stain instead of paint for a dark glaze. For

a subtle texture, try dabbing a stippling brush, a ball of cheesecloth, or a sponge over the glaze. More dramatic textures can be created with rags and plastic bags. Stiff brushes, combs, and other homemade tools can be used to create linear textures. And remember, glazes are not reserved for walls. They also can be used on cabinetry and trim.



inconspicuous location, and keep your eyes peeled for runs or drips.

I glaze 12 in. to 18 in. at a time, diagonally from left to right. I work quickly from top to bottom first, then bottom to top. This motion not only is efficient, but it also helps to prevent lap marks, those dark spots where glaze overlaps. Lap marks are tough to avoid completely; applying the glaze diagonally makes them less noticeable.

When I apply a glaze, I like to stay about 1 in. from the edges of the walls. Often, the texturing tool I'm using is too big to get into the corners and just makes a mess of the adjacent surface. I use a small disposable brush to work the glaze into the edges instead.

I also don't texture all the way to the edge of the glaze I've applied. This is called the wet edge, and I leave the glaze heavy and untextured until my next pass. Keeping a wet edge allows me to work back into the previously textured area.

Once the wall is completed, I step back and take a look. With an oil-based glaze, I still may be able to touch up the texture or fix a run. Be careful fixing a troublesome area, though. Messing around with paint that is starting to set up can cause obvious flaws. And don't be too critical. The glaze will become more subtle as it dries. □

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One-of-a-kind walls. Glazing is a great, inexpensive route to a custom look. From a subtle, rustic texture with analogous colors (photo left) to a bold strié, glazes open a lot of possibilities for your walls.

Keeping up with fast-drying latex glazes

Although I prefer to mix glazes with oil-based paints, I have done plenty of glazing with latex products as well. Here is a list of things I do to extend open time and work more efficiently when glazing with latex.

- **Add paint conditioner to the glaze.** I mix latex glazes the same way I mix oil glazes: 1 part latex paint, 2 parts water-based glazing liquid, and a little water (instead of paint thinner) to thin the glaze. But I also add a fourth ingredient. To increase open time and emulate the smoothing properties of oil-based paint, I use a small amount of a latex glaze extender (www.benjaminmoore.com)

or a paint conditioner, such as Floetrol (www.flood.com).

- **Wet the walls.** To increase open time and to prevent dragging, I wet the walls before applying the latex glaze. In a small bucket, I mix warm water and a drop of dish soap to keep the water from evaporating. Just before I'm ready to apply the glaze to an area, I dip a rag or sponge into the water

and wipe down the wall only enough to dampen it, but not so much that the water drips.

- **Work with a partner.** One of the keys to any successful glaze is working quickly. When I glaze with latex, I like to work with a partner. One person applies the glaze, and the other textures. Working with a partner is efficient, and the applicator should have plenty of time to step back from the

wall and inspect the glaze in progress.

- **Seal the finished walls.** Latex glazes are not as durable as oils. After the glaze has cured for 24 hours, I seal it with a low-luster water-based polyurethane. I use a brush or pad to apply the clear coat, but not a roller. You won't see them until the wall dries, but roller marks will be visible in the clear coat.